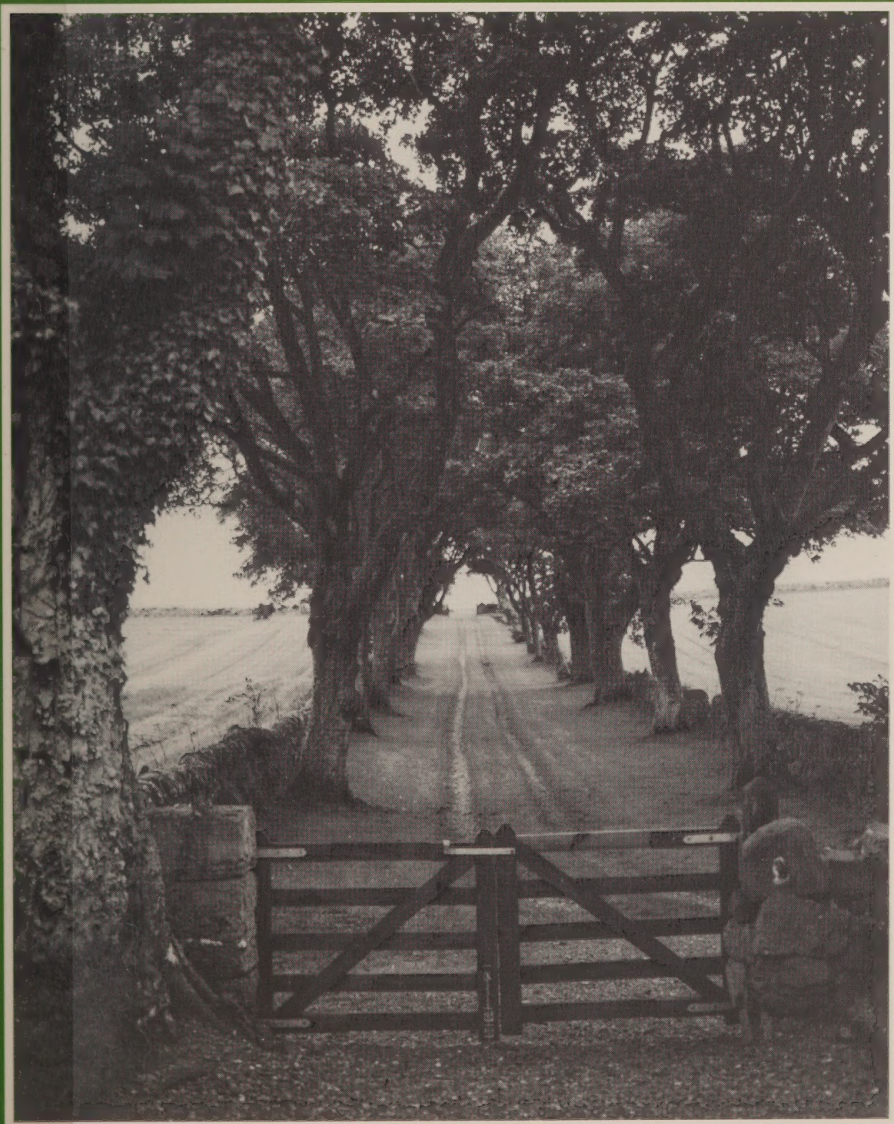


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(Oct 1997)

SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ OCTOBER 1997

SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit

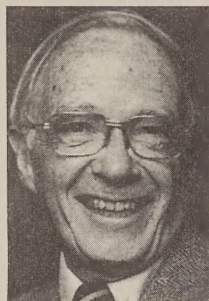
of unity among humankind.

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FROM THE P R E S I D E N T



As I was thinking about the nature of our sacred journey through life, I came across the following teaching by Lama Surya Das, in his wonderful new book, *Awakening the Buddha Within*.

“Those of us who embark on spiritual paths are motivated in different ways. Some of us want to know the unknowable; others want to know themselves; still others want to know everything. Some people want transformation; others want miracles. Many want to alleviate suffering, help others, and leave the world a better place. Most of us are seeking love and fulfillment in one way or another. Everyone wants inner peace, acceptance, satisfaction, and happiness. We all want genuine remedies to feelings of despair, alienation, and hopelessness. Don’t we all want to find spiritual nourishment and healing, renewal and a greater sense of meaning?

“Don’t we all hope to meet God, with his/her myriad faces? Gandhi once said, ‘I claim to be a passionate seeker after truth, which is but another name for God.’ As we all search for truth or God, don’t we pray that we will find our way, our purpose? Don’t we hope to find our true selves, all we are and can be? Too often, however, our search for truth or meaning lacks focus or direction.

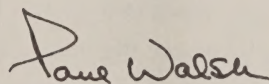
“Like many others, for example, you may have looked for meaning in relationships that failed you, or you may be frustrated by a career that isn’t delivering the rewards you expected. It could be that you’re disturbed by shaky values and rampant materialism. You can’t help asking yourself if this is all there is. Is this really my life? Is this what I will be when I grow up—which is now? Is there

nothing more? When does my real life begin? Is there no greater connection, no deeper purpose and sense of truly belonging? Why does life so often feel barren and lonely, and why is there so much fear, doubt, and anxiety in my heart?

“Perhaps you sometimes feel a homesickness, a sadness, and a sense that something is terribly wrong. You might experience this as a yearning for something that is lost, something that seems so familiar and yet so distant. You might feel hungry and needy and aware that nothing has been able to fully satisfy you—at least not for very long. It’s like drinking salt water while floating adrift on the great ocean; it’s a drink that can’t possibly alleviate your thirst.

“*Rejoice!* You are living the core issues grappled with by every consciously alive human being. This is no small thing—this is the ‘Big Time,’ the Great Way walked by all those who have awakened to freedom, peace, and enlightenment, You’re in the heavyweight division, wrestling with the multidimensional angels of life. You want to see them, you want to understand them, and—like Jacob—you want to be blessed by them.”*

Yes! However frightening, or boring, or painful, or confusing life can be at times, stay with the sacred journey! You can trust it to lead you to ultimate meaning and truth and joy!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Paul Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Walsh".

Paul Walsh

**From Awakening The Buddha Within, pages 11-12, by Surya Das. Copyright © 1997 by Surya Das. Used by permission of Broadway Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.*

FROM THE E D I T O R

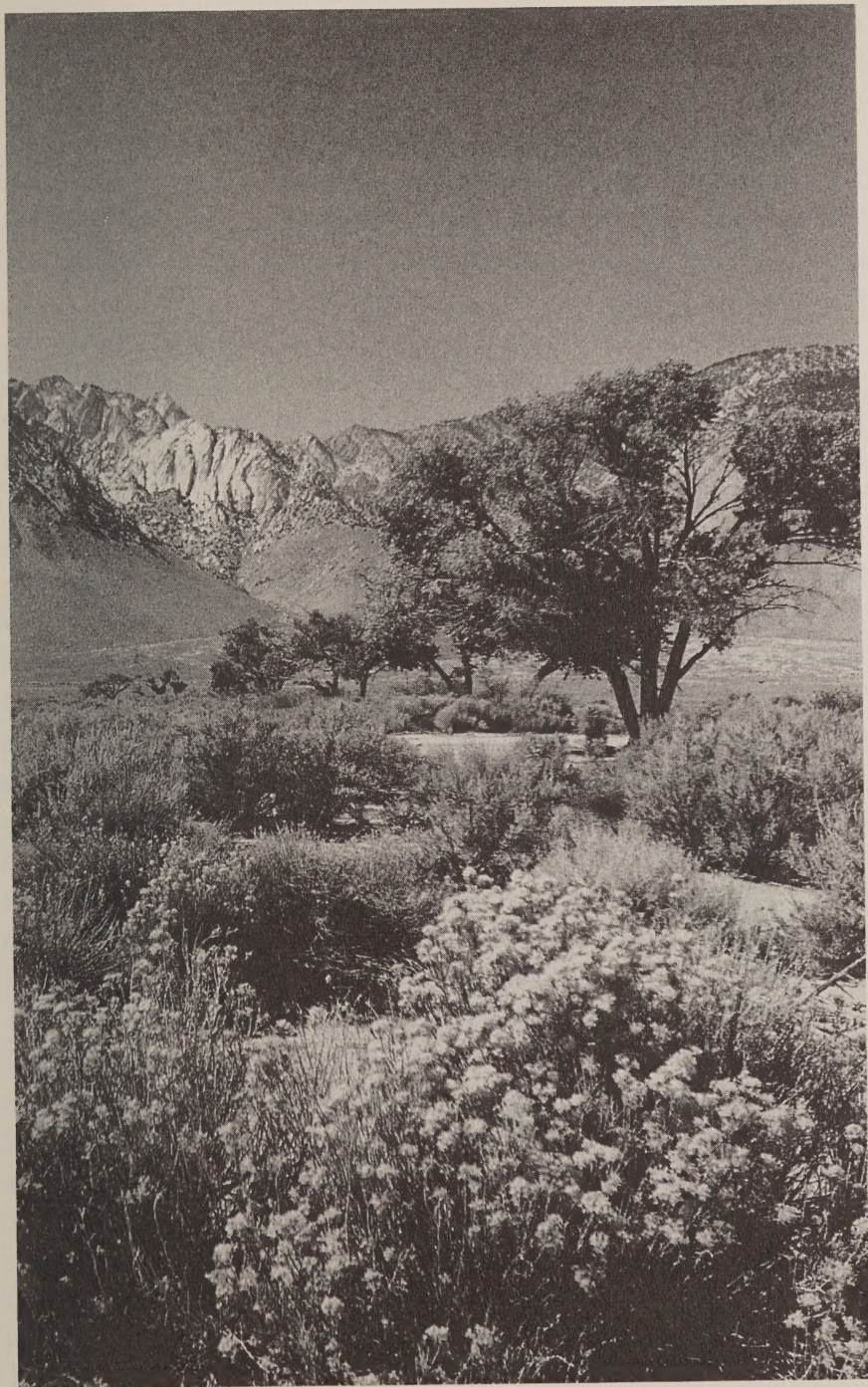


My daily journey takes me from my climate-controlled home into an air-conditioned car that transports the kids to school, me to work, and allows for stops along the way—grocery store, dry cleaners, bagel shop—you know the routine. Paved roads, street signs, and painted parking spaces conveniently line the way. Often as I go from place to place my eyes are on the road while my mind is somewhere else entirely. cursory attention to the signs tells me when to get off, how fast to drive, and how far until I will reach my destination.

Other journeys aren't so clear cut, nor well laid out. Late one summer, seven companions and I trekked the high Sierra of Northern California for a week-long discovery expedition. From the moment a sixty-pound backpack was hoisted onto my back and bulky hiking boots were laced upon my feet, it was clear I was out of my comfort zone. I longed for signs to warn me: *Dangerous Curves Ahead*, *Slippery When Wet*, and *Deer Crossing*.

On our second morning out our guides tasked me with getting the group to a distant lake by sundown. I was handed a terrain map that showed elevations, latitudes, mountains, valleys, river beds, and chasms. There were no clearly marked paths. After a remedial lesson on how to use a compass, the guides stepped back, promising to step up again if I began to lead the group over a sheer cliff, but otherwise we were on our own.

Needless to say, we took the long way around. The river we planned to follow had been reduced, by drought, to a boulder-ridden path. The hills that looked passable on the map were rugged



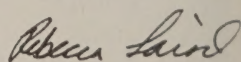
cliffs. Long after nightfall we rounded the final bend, shed our burdens, and dove into the clear, mountain lake that was truly a dip into Eden.

That night I felt completely alive and present in the moment. For a full day, I had focused my energies on where I was going. The focused attention I gave to that day's living lead me to a real discovery: the journey is about more than getting to a destination, it's also about what happens along the way.

Well, of course, the sacred journey is more like a discovery expedition than a freeway drive. There are few signs or paved paths. Mainly we follow faint footprints and from time to time we stumble upon ample evidence that others have walked this way, too. That's what this issue of *Sacred Journey* offers.

This month, in a question-and-answer feature, Frederick Buechner reminds us that "God speaks to us through what happens to us." (If Buechner is a name new to you, *Illuminations* offers a sampling of wisdom culled from his books.) In this month's *A Transforming Experience* Joyce Davidson recounts how her mother's tragic death led her to a "broad spectrum of thoughts and feelings that require faith--a faith I never had, not even as a child." Rabbi Allen S. Maller addresses the practice of fasting as a means to learn compassion, and Rachel Naomi Remen, a medical doctor, reflects on how her grandfather's concept of prayer turned her fears into knowledge of God's presence. John and Jean Pilch write of the extended community of friends and family that sustained them during Jean's struggle with cancer. Poets Hillary Chapman and Mary E. Penrose call us to awareness of the divine in the here and now. And Victoria Beynon, a hospice chaplain, finds the holy symbols of another woman evoke a desire to pray for light and strength.

Each of these writers is a companion on this journey. Lean into them. Learn from them. We're here to walk a little of life's way with you.



Rebecca Laird

THE SACRED JOURNEY: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Frederick Buechner

Frederick Buechner was recently described as "a writer who speaks of his faith in muted tones." His literary elegance and refusal to parrot platitudes have drawn me into nearly every one of his books in the decade since I was introduced to The Sacred Journey, the first of his three-part autobiographical series. He brings his high skill as a novelist and blends it with the ability to ask deep questions and live into partial answers. He delves into his own life, reluctantly at times, to discover where faith and life touch. Rather than an exercise in nostalgia, Buechner writes, "...it is mainly for some clue to where I am going that I search through where I have been, for some hint as to who I am becoming or failing to become that I delve into what used to be."

Frederick Buechner graduated from Princeton University and Union Theological Seminary, was ordained a Presbyterian minister, and was the chair of the Religion Department at the Phillips Exeter Academy before he began to write full-time. His novels are acclaimed, winners of the O'Henry Prize and Rosenthal Award, and were nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. He is author of thirty books and father to three grown daughters. He lives with his wife, Judy, in Vermont.

This writer/teacher/minister calls out through his writing and his living: "Listen to your life, see it for the fathomless mystery that it is."

Rebecca Laird: In the introduction to *The Sacred Journey* you describe reading the story of another's life is "like looking through someone else's photograph album." If we were to open the album of your life to the most recent photos what events would we find highlighted? What are the defining moments during this stage of your journey?

Frederick Buechner: Two things occur to me. The first is the death, about eighteen months ago, of my oldest friend, the poet James Merrill. We had known each other for fifty-five years, since we were fourteen year-olds going to Lawrenceville [School] together, and in losing him I lost a precious and of course irreplaceable part of my past. Hardly a day goes by without my missing him, and I continue to dream of him often. The dreams are never very satisfactory—we are usually meeting in some crowded place like a cocktail party or a railway station and saying goodbye—but it is always good at least to catch a glimpse of him. The second is the births of

Gerrish Thurber (left), a mentor from Buechner's days at the Lawrenceville School, and James Merrill (center), Buechner's boyhood friend, stand with Frederick (right) during a 1993 awards dinner.



the six grandsons that our three daughters have produced, two each, since 1993. There is no telling the delight they are to me both in themselves and in the way they seem to be assuring me that even when my song is finally over, at least some faint echo of the melody has a chance of lingering on. My past has been diminished by Jimmy's death, but in them I feel I have an enchanted new future.

Many of the preachers I know have dog-eared copies of *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* and *Whistling in the Dark*, two books of pithy, image-driven definitions of hard-to-grasp and overused religious words. These days the word "spirituality" is used freely and often. Would you try your hand at defining it for us?

The way it is apt to be tossed around today, the word "spirituality" generally seems to mean something fuzzy around the edges and vaguely uplifting. More precisely, I think, it points to that area of experience where the human spirit—whatever it is that makes us human—is touched by, illumined by, maybe even transformed by, God's spirit--whatever it is that makes God, whether we believe in God or not, what we most deeply hunger for.

In *Telling Secrets* and later in a novel you describe Brendan, the sixth-century Irish sailor/saint, who spent most of his life searching for, but not finding, the Land of the Blessed. What has been your lifelong search? Have you found what you were looking for?

I think I will say the peace of God. In the language of the 11th chapter of Hebrews, I have by no means "received what was promised" but from time to time, I think, I have "seen and greeted it from afar." And of course Brendan the Navigator never reached the Land of the Blessed either, at least not in his little leather-hulled boat.

In our publication our writers often share with others the way they pray and the regular practices they use to cultivate the spiritual life. What are your spiritual routines? Do you keep a journal? What do you read or listen to that nourishes your soul?

I pray all the time at odd moments like driving somewhere in the car, or waiting for something to happen like sleep, or being for some reason or other particularly sad, or scared, or happy, or you name it. They are mostly very brief, rather fragmented prayers, but there is one formal one, known sometimes as Saint Patrick's Breastplate, that is currently full of power for me. It begins, "Christ be with me, Christ within me,/ Christ behind me, Christ before me/ Christ beside me, Christ to win me,/Christ to comfort and restore me."

I keep a diary rather than a journal (which I think of as a notch or two higher) which is 95% of the time not religious especially but merely an uninspired and largely illegible recital of what happened each day. What has nourished my soul most in recent years is not so much any particular books I have read or music or (God knows) sermons I have listened to but rather, solipsistic as it sounds, that part of myself where my own books come from, which is just as mysterious as that part of myself where my dreams come from, and in the end, I suppose, is the same place.

As you know, this issue of our journal is the first to bear our new name, *Sacred Journey*, a name we share with one of your books. Some readers may see the title and ask: *What's so sacred about my life? It's just one difficult day after another! If I look at life as a journey where can I expect it to take me? How do you suggest a skeptic begin to claim life as a sacred journey?*

What is sacred about all of our lives, even those of us who would never dream of using such a word for it, is that God speaks to us through what happens to us in them—even through such unpromising events as walking up the road to get the mail out of the mail

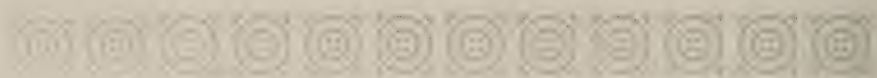
box, maybe, or seeing something in the TV news that brings you up short, or laughing yourself silly with a friend. If skeptics ask to be shown an instance of God speaking to them in *their* lives, I suggest that they pay closest attention to the next time when, for unaccountable reasons, they find tears in their eyes.

You live in New England, one of the most spectacular places to be during the month of October. Can you leave us with an autumnal story or image that allows us vicariously to travel to the place you call home?

One fall years ago, when our children were young, we decided to leave the front door of our house here in Vermont open so that every day (we closed it at night) the fallen leaves could come drifting into the front hall. What was so magical about that? I don't know. It had something to do with seeing the beauty of the leaves—mustard yellow and crimson and brittle brown—in a place where we had never seen it before and thus seeing it better or at least differently. And it had something to do with experiencing fall as not just something that was happening but something that was happening to *us*.

Frederick Buechner's most recent book, On the Road with the Archangel, a fairytale novel based on the Book of Tobit will be released this month and is published by HarperCollins. His books can be purchased from your local bookstores.

I L L U M I N A T I O N S



The question is not whether the things that happen to you are chance things or God's things because, of course, they are both at once. There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak—even the walk from the house to the garage that you have walked ten thousand times before, even the moments when you cannot believe there is a God who speaks at all anywhere. He speaks, I believe, and the words he speaks are incarnate in the flesh and blood of our selves and of our own footsore and sacred journeys.

- *The Sacred Journey*

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.

- *Now and Then*

Stop trying to protect, to rescue, to judge, to manage the lives around you—your children's lives, the lives of your husband, your wife, your friends—because that is just what you are powerless to do. Remember that the lives of other people are not your business. They are their business. They are God's business because they all have God whether they use the word God or not. Even your own life is not your business. It also is God's business. Leave it to God. It is an astonishing thought. It can become a life-transforming thought.

- *Telling Secrets*

Faith is the word that describes the direction our feet start moving when we find that we are loved. Faith is stepping out into the unknown with nothing to guide us but a hand just beyond our grasp.

- *The Magnificent Defeat*

It is our business, as we journey, to keep our hearts open to the bright-winged presence of the Holy Ghost within us and the Kingdom of God among us until little by little compassionate love begins to change from a moral exercise, from a matter of gritting our teeth and doing our good deed for the day, into a joyous, spontaneous, self-forgetting response to the most real aspect of all reality, which is that the world is holy because God made it and so is every one of us as well. To live as though that reality does not exist is to be a stranger in a world of strangers. To live out of and toward that reality is little by little to become whole.

- *The Longing for Home*

Our stories are all stories of *searching*. We search for a good self to be and for good work to do. We search to become human in a world that tempts us always to be less than human or looks to us to be more. We search to love and to be loved. And in a world where it is often hard to believe in much of anything, we search to believe in something holy and beautiful and life-transcending that will give meaning and purpose to the lives we live.

- *The Longing for Home*

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE



Breaking Up Unplowed Ground Joyce Davidson

In *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis traces the beginning of his long spiritual journey to the death of his mother when he was a child. He equates joy, “an unsatisfied desire which is more desirable than any other satisfaction,” with grief, and describes a moment of epiphany as a young man when the memory of “joy that I had once had and now lacked for years” allowed him to “return from exile and desert lands to my own country.”

The death of my mother and my deep grief started me on a renewed search for meaning.

I was a “PK,” the universally recognized (at least in my universe) abbreviation for preacher’s kid. That was the term that most defined me as a child. My father was a minister in a fundamentalist denomination; my mother was the quintessential preacher’s wife—and beyond. She was so totally devoted to their ministry that I believe if she had been born a generation later she would have joined the clergy herself. Years later, in trying to explain my childhood, I told friends that it was like being raised by a priest and a nun. We ate, slept, and breathed the church.

Joyce Davidson, a grief and bereavement counselor, works with terminally ill patients and their families at Newark Beth Israel Hospital.

But it didn't work for me. As a child, and certainly as an adolescent, I began to doubt and feel left out. I couldn't swallow it, and I couldn't admit it, and I was scared to death that I might be wrong. I was terrified of dying. I sat in the back on long car trips bargaining with God (just in case) to spare my life so that I could have another chance to believe in Him. If my mother wasn't home when I returned from school, I was afraid that the rapture had occurred and I alone was left. Every sermon convicted me.

As a young adult I fled all that and decided that I was probably agnostic because I wasn't sure of anything. But I wasn't happy about that either. Everyone I grew up around had answers except me, and I was unsettled and still frightened, though a little smug.

After becoming a mother I tried any number of denominations, hoping to bestow on my children a positive, viable faith that had eluded me. But of course that hardly ever works. When my son was four, he informed me accusingly, "You're the only mother who doesn't believe in God!" And when my daughter was about seven, we drove by a church that we had briefly attended when she was in pre-school, and she asked, "We used to go there, right? How many churches don't we go to, Mom?"

During all this time my mother was in the throes of early-onset Alzheimer's. She lived with the disease for well over twenty years. She was so humiliated that she once told me that she wished suicide were not a sin that would doom her to hell. She had been bright, inquisitive, lively, complex, fiercely proud, and often fearsome. We could *never* fool her; she was the canniest person I have ever known. I don't remember a word she couldn't spell or a literary work she hadn't heard of; whenever she sat down for any length of time she had a book in her hand.

We lost her, a piece at a time, over many years. Her keen mind

Joyce's Mother



*My
grief
was
too
massive
for me
to
find a
place
to
put
it.*

dissolved into confusion then fear, her flashing dark eyes dulled, and finally the essence of this woman disappeared completely. When she first went into the nursing home, I sat with her for hours, although she no longer knew who I was. Once, she looked around the room with bewilderment and said, "I've lost . . . I've lost . . ." "What have you lost, Mother?" She looked me in the eye and said, "Well, just about everything."

As a child I used to run to keep up with her in the department store, because she shopped the way she did everything—on a dead run. Now she endlessly wandered the halls of the nursing home, unable to return to her room

because she had no idea that she had a room. She had no idea, period.

If I believed in God I would have asked how it happened that a woman who had devoted her life to God should go on like this year after year. My family prayed, and I hoped for her death. We expected to feel a sense of relief when she was released from this nightmare.

What we didn't expect was that she would be beaten to death by another nursing home resident. She lived in pain, struggling for breath, for twelve days. In the casket her lips were sewn shut because her jaw was shattered, her broken nose was frightfully crooked, and the heavy mortuary makeup couldn't obscure the deep bruises all over her face.

And so there was no relief. My grief was too massive for me to find a place to put it. It was a physically heavy thing. It was not that I missed her presence; I had long ago said good-bye to the woman who was my mother. It was that I couldn't bear the unspeakable circumstances of her death.

Then I began to process it the way I always have dealt with a problem or crisis: I went to the library. I knew what my mother

had gone through before she died: I wanted to know what had happened to her afterwards. I checked out every book I could find about the near-death experience, not really knowing what to expect in either the books or my reaction to them.

I reflected on the last twenty years of her life and contrasted them with her release from the tyranny of her body and the possibility of her having been surrounded by the intense glow of unconditional love and joy. I came to believe that if she had been given the choice, if someone had said, "You can go on the way you are, or you can go through a painful, terrifying experience and be released from this," she would have chosen the beating. And I found tremendous solace in that.

But here's the really unexpected part. Without realizing that it was happening, I found myself more open to a broad spectrum of thoughts and feelings that require faith—a faith I never had, not even as a child. Not my parents' faith, but my own. My paradigm was shifting and no one was more surprised than I.

I began to "break up unplowed ground." I embraced the "adventure in openness to a multi-dimensional reality" of which Ernest Becker spoke in his book, *The Denial of Death*. I don't know where this road leads, but I am confident that it is the right road. Most of all, though, I have been released from the gripping terror.

For many years I found myself on the outside of a wall, on the inside of which were people of faith. They had come there from all directions and through many different doors, but they all had faith in common . . . and that eluded me. I was Soren Kierkegaard's "cultural man," existing in a state where, as Jeffrey Kauffman, author of *Awareness of Mortality*, says, "We trace our fears and loves and hates, our night terrors and joyous daybreaks, our truths and lies, objective reality, natural science and gods, back to our own self."

Henri Nouwen has said that when we can face death with hope we can live life with generosity, and Albert Einstein said, "The greatest experience we can have is the mysterious."

It is possible that if my mother had simply continued to dete-

riorate and had died of natural causes, I would not have reached the brink of oblivion that is also the brink of infinity. I might never have discovered the faith Nouwen discusses that annihilates dread, continually developing itself out of the death throes of dread. The nature of her death and my response to it provided a doorway through the wall that I had walked alongside all my life. It was, perhaps, her final gift to me.

Joyce Davidson in center with her mother and daughter.



THE BIBLE'S SPIRITUAL DIET



Allen S. Maller

Almost all religions have special foods and diets for their sacred occasions. How, when, and what you eat has long been recognized to be filled with symbolic meanings as well as calories. There are special Jewish foods for all the major holy days with one exception: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

This day, according to the Bible, is a fast day. (Lev. 16:29 and 23:27) For twenty-four hours Jews (in good health) are supposed to afflict their souls by abstaining from eating or drinking anything. What is the bible trying to teach us by decreeing a day of fasting? What spiritual benefits occur when we fast?

First of all, fasting teaches compassion. It is easy to talk about the world's hunger problem. We can feel sorry that millions of people go to bed hungry each day. But it isn't until one can really feel it in one's own body, that the impact is truly there. Compassion based on empathy is much stronger and more consistent than compassion based on pity. This feeling must lead to action. Fasting is never an end in itself; that's why it has so many different outcomes. But all the other outcomes are amoral if compassion is not enlarged and extended through fasting. As the prophet Isaiah said, "The truth is that at the same time

Allen S. Maller is Rabbi of Temple Akiba in Culver City, CA. He is the author of a book on Jewish mysticism entitled God, Sex and Kabbalah and distributed by Samuel Weiser.

**The purpose of fasting
is to teach healthy
restraint:
how to say “no” when
our emotions would
tend to guide
our actions.**

-Rabbi Simon Glustrom

you fast, you pursue your own interests and oppress your workers. Your fasting makes you violent, and you quarrel and fight. The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor.” (Isaiah 58:3-7)

Second, fasting is an exercise in willpower. Most people think they can’t fast because it’s so hard. But actually the discomfort of hunger pains is relatively minor. A headache, muscle pains from too much exercise, and most certainly a toothache, all produce more severe pains than hunger pangs. I have on occasion fasted for three days, and I found that after the first twenty-four hours the pain decreases slightly as the stomach becomes numb. The reason it is so hard to fast is because it is so easy to stop. All you have to do is take a bite; and the food is all around, and in easy reach. Thus the key to fasting is the willpower to decide again and again not to eat. Our society has increasingly become one of self-indulgence. We lack self-discipline. Fasting goes in direct opposition to our increasing “softness” in life. When people exercise their willpower and fast they are affirming their self-control and celebrating their mastery over themselves. We need to continually prove that we can do it, because we are so often aware that we fail to be self-disciplined.

Fasting serves as a penance. Self-inflicted pain alleviates guilt, although it is much better to reduce one’s guilt by offsetting acts of righteousness to others. This is why contributing *Tsedekah* (Doing what is right. Acting correctly and giving generously.) is such an important part of Yom Kippur and indeed fasting which doesn’t increase compassion is ignored by God. However, the concept of fasting as a penance helps us understand that our suffering can be beneficial. Contemporary culture desires happiness above all else. Any suffering is seen as unnecessary and indeed evil. While we occasionally hear people echo values from the past that suffering can help one grow, or that a life unalloyed with pain would lack in the qualities of greatness, the dominant attitude among people today is that the most important thing is “you should only be happy.” Thus the satisfaction one can derive from the self-induced pain from

fasting provides insight into a better way of reacting to the externally caused suffering we have to experience anyway. Taking a pill is not always the best way to alleviate pain, especially if by doing so we alleviate the symptoms without reaching the root cause.

First, in our list of outcomes, fasting is a denial of dependencies. We live in a consumer society. We are constantly bombarded by advertising that tells us we must have this thing or that to be healthy, happy, popular or wise. By fasting we assert that we do not need to be dependent on external things, even such an essential thing as food. If our most basic need for food and drink can be suspended for twenty-four hours, how much the more so can our needs for all the nonessentials be ignored. Judaism doesn't advocate asceticism. In fact it's against Jewish law to deny oneself normal pleasures. But in our overheated consumer society it is necessary to periodically turn ourselves off to the constant pressure to consume, and forcibly remind ourselves that "man does not live by bread alone."

The second outcome of fasting is improved physical health. Of course, one twenty-four hour fast will not have any more effect than one day of exercise. Only prolonged and regular fasting promotes health. The annual fast on Yom Kippur can, however, awaken us to the importance of how much, and how often, we eat. For many years research has shown that when animals were underfed, receiving a balanced diet that in quantity was below the norm for maximum physical health, their life spans were prolonged from 50% to 100%. Other studies indicate that people with a below average caloric intake are less susceptible to cancer. Finally, with all the additives placed in food these days a reduction in total food intake has to be helpful. Since our society has problems with overabundance, fasting provides a good option. It was common in *Kabbalistic* and *Hasidic* circles to fast every Monday and Thursday. If one eats normal meals the other five days, this would result in a decrease of 25% in caloric intake. Over the years this could add years to one's life span.

Third, fasting is good for the soul. It often serves as an aid for

spiritual experiences. For most people, especially those who have not fasted regularly before, the hunger pains are a distraction. People who are not by nature spiritual/emotional individuals will probably find that a one-day fast is insufficient to help induce an altered state of consciousness. Those who have fasted regularly on Yom Kippur might like to try a two or three day fast (liquids permitted). It is best to go about your daily activities and devote your late evening to meditation and prayer. Since you have already fasted for Yom Kippur the easiest way is to simply extend the fast another thirty-six to forty-eight hours. We are prohibited to fast prior to Yom Kippur (eating a good meal prior to *Kol Nidre* is a *mitsvah* [or blessing]). This is because Judaism opposes excessive asceticism.

The fourth outcome of fasting is the performance of a *mitsvah*. There is after all, only one reason to fast; it is a *mitsvah* to fast on Yom Kippur. We do not do *mitsvot* in order to benefit ourselves. We do *mitsvot* because our duty as Jews requires that we do them. Fasting is a very personal *mitsvah*. Its effects are primarily personal. Fasting on Yom Kippur is a personal offering to the God of Israel from each member of the family of Israel. For over one hundred generations Jews have fasted on Yom Kippur. Your personal act of fasting is part of the Jewish people's covenant with God. The only real reason to fast is to fulfill a *mitsvah*. The outcome of your fast can be any of a half dozen paths to self-fulfillment. Simply knowing that you have done one of your duties as an adult Jew is the most basic and primary outcome of all.

Finally, fasting should be combined with the study of Torah. Indeed, the more one studies the less one has need of fasting. A medieval text states, "Better eat a little and study twice as much, for the study of Torah is superior to fasting."

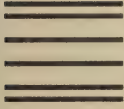
Fasting is a very personal experiential offering. However, while

*It is
necessary
to
periodically
turn
ourselves
off
to the
constant
pressure
to
consume.*

study is also a personal experience, it takes place with a text and/or a teacher. The Divine is more readily and truly experienced in dialogue with others than in meditation. Let your fasting be for you the beginning of the removal of the chains of oppression.

Janet Gnaill





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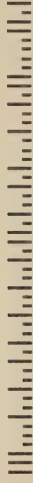
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SPIRITUALITY & THE FAMILY



Little Beloved Soul

Rachel Naomi Remen

I would like to tell you about my grandfather and his concept of prayer. I had not realized that the story I'm going to tell you was a story about prayer and I had no idea how important it was to me, but as I was preparing for this article, I realized it permeates my daily experience of life. Isn't it funny how something not in your conscious memory can do that? This is the memory that came back.

My grandfather was an orthodox rabbi and a student of Kabbala. My parents were young socialists who felt that religion was the "opiate of the masses." So Grandfather was my connection to any reality larger than the class struggle and social well-being. He and I used to have this secret relationship with God in which I was encouraged to speak directly from my heart to God and to listen in my heart for God's response

When I was small, about five or six, they were still teaching religion in the public schools. Every week there was an assembly in which the entire school was gathered, and the principal, a fundamentalist, stood up and did a fire-and-brimstone kind of preach-

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. is an Associate Clinical Professor of Family and Community Medicine at The University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine and author of Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal (Riverhead Books). This article was excerpted from "Pray Without Ceasing," that appeared in Noetic Sciences Review, Summer 1993 and is reprinted with the author's permission.

ing it was important that we get on our knees and pray three times a day because we needed to remind God that we were there. She may not have actually said this, but this is what I took away. You had to make Him look at you! Because if God turned His face from you, you would wither up and die, like an autumn leaf...and then she actually held up this large dried brown autumn leaf.

As I looked at it I felt such fear, such enormous terror, because it seemed to me, even as a five-year-old, that God had a lot of things on His mind, a lot of other people. And in-between the times I was

praying, He might blink and then what would happen to me? I became very insecure, depressed, anxious, and was unable to sleep.

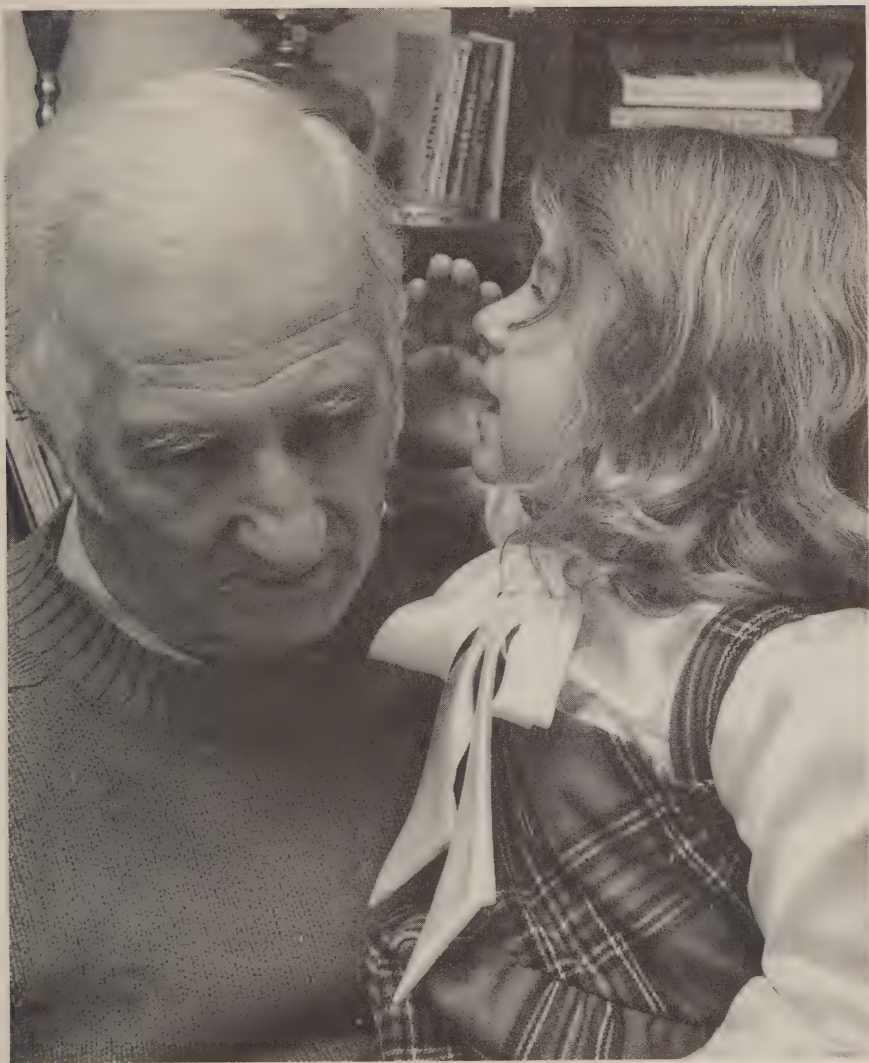
*God is
there
and you
are not
alone.*

Of course, this is not something one can discuss with young socialist parents, so I had to wait until my grandfather came to visit. I remember the pain of this. It is very interesting to remember it as an adult—I don't think you can feel an-

guish like that as an adult. You have to be young.

After several days, my grandfather came. When we were alone I told him what had happened, and I asked him a question, "What if God blinks?" It was the only time that I've ever seen him angry.

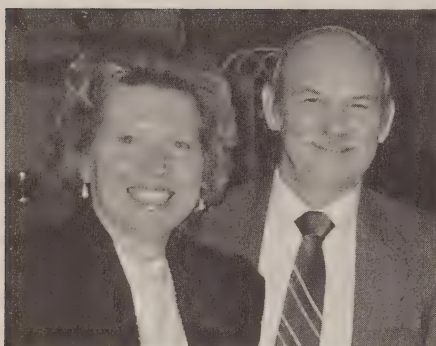
What he said was, "*Nischuma-la*" (and by the way, for many years I thought "*Nischuma-la*" meant "Little Naomi"—it actually means "Little Beloved Soul"). He said, "*Nischuma-la*, if you wake up at night, would you know if you were alone in the house? Would you know if Mom and Dad had gone out to the movies if you wake up in the dark at night? And I said, "Sure!" Then he said, "How would you know that you weren't alone in the house? Would you see them and look at them?" I said, "No." He said, "Would you hear them? Is that how you'd know?" I said, "No." He said, "Would they talk to you? Is that how you would know?" I said, "No," and I remembered thinking, "How odd. He's asking stupid questions like a grown-up," because my grandfather never did that. I said with irritation, "No—I would just *know*. I would just *know* that I wasn't alone in the house."



My grandfather smiled at me with great love and said, "Good. That's how God knows you're there. He doesn't need to look at you. And that's how you know that God is there. You just know." In remembering this, I realized for the first time that perhaps this was what prayer was—that knowing. That's how you pray, by that knowing. You know that God is there and you're not alone in the house.

The Prayers of Friends in Our Battle Against Cancer

John & Jean Pilch



Written in 1994, shortly after Jean went into remission, our article, "Battling Cancer with Prayer," was published in the April 1996 issue of *Fellowship in Prayer* (now *Sacred Journey*). By the time the article appeared, cancer

activity had returned in Jean's lung area. There was no mass, nor was there any other sign of disease except for the accumulation of fluid between the lung and the lining that encloses it. During the early summer of 1995, Jean received another round of chemotherapy. A test for ovarian cancer indicated that the therapy was effective. We were able to take a vacation that year, and Jean hiked with me in the Finger Lakes region of New York, at a slow pace, of course.

Everything continued to look so well in 1996 that we purchased airline tickets for a trip to Vienna and the Czech Republic to visit friends. The oncologist approved. Toward the end of April and early May, disquieting symptoms began to reappear. We canceled the trip and began

Dr. John J. Pilch teaches Bible at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Jean Peters Pilch served as Conference Coordinator for Maryland New Directions, Inc., a career-counseling agency in the Baltimore area.

a third round of chemotherapy treatments. A cat scan was scheduled and the results were shocking. There appeared to be signs of metastasis. The oncologist believed that chemotherapy would only postpone the inevitable which would come quickly. He ordered oxygen for our home and suggested registering for the hospice. Jean was visibly weakening, losing considerable weight, and seemed to be deteriorating. I struggled to match the prognosis from the cat scan with the beginning of a third round of chemotherapy. How could one tell, so early on, that treatment was ineffective? How could the disease flare up so suddenly to such frightening proportions when tests were regularly showing no sign of disease?

Though we never stopped praying, now was definitely the time to intensify our efforts. The very day we received the cat scan results, I contacted my scholar-friends around the world on the internet and urged them to join their prayers to ours. Three days later, when Jean was reasonably strong enough, I took her to our parish for the rite of Anointing the Sick. We placed strong confidence in this sacrament.

Relatives and many friends registered Jean with a variety of groups to have Masses said or prayers offered on her behalf. I began to pray to the Servant of God, Jesuit Father Walter Cizek. My father was certain that as a young student in Poland, he had met and known Father Cizek. Helping Jean regain her health could move Father Cizek closer to officially recognized sainthood. Moreover, both of us pray regularly to our "ancestors," my father, mother, and brothers, and Jean's grandparents and aunt.

A grade school classmate of mine sent flowers (as did others) and a copy of a novena prayer she had begun. For nine successive days she went to church, left nine copies of this prayer in a pew, and was confident her prayers for Jean would not fail.

*The
pledges
of
love
were
there
to
see.*

Jean's former secretary during the years she was a director of religious education in Illinois had moved on to Colorado where she earned a doctorate in psychology. She called to express her concerns and said: "I'm not a religious person, but I believe in positive energy. Each evening at 9 p.m. you and Jean (in Baltimore) hold hands, and I will slip mine between yours from here in Colorado."

My Uncle Ed sent videotaped messages followed by joyous Polish polka programs he had taped for her enjoyment in his part of the country. A *Fellowship in Prayer* subscriber in Baltimore called when she read the April 1996 article. After I shared our new experiences with her, she urged us to remain strong in faith and assured us of her prayerful remembrance.

As strength allowed, Jean continued to go to the office for at least a brief while each day. I drove her to and fro. Her coworkers and executive director formed a strong and loving support group. Her challenging assignments continued to provide daily meaning for her life.



Jean gathered all the prayer cards, printouts from the internet, and greeting cards and placed them in a cardboard box she dubbed her “love box.” The love box sat atop a dresser in the bedroom in her direct line of vision. As often as she had to lie down to rest, when she retired in the evening, or awoke in the morning, the pledges of love were there to see.

By early July, the oncologist was amazed to see progress from the chemo treatment. He immediately recommended a new treatment, a “smart” form of chemotherapy that prefers to attack cancer cells and leaves the healthy ones alone. For the first time in all her treatments, Jean’s hair began to grow rather than continue to fall out! The chemical seemed to know what to attack and what to leave alone.

In mid-August, the oncologist said it was clear to him that Jean would only continue to grow stronger. She had definitely returned to this side of the line between here and eternity.

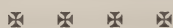
What did we make of all these prayers? We accepted them gratefully and were confident that they all contributed to Jean’s remarkable turnabout. We do not believe God is a master-engineer sitting at a switchboard in heaven to prevent train wrecks in creation. Rather, we believe all human beings are striving, each in his and her own way, whether scientist, cleric, or ordinary person, to fulfill God’s command to “have dominion over the earth.” While we have learned very much over the millennia about how creation functions, we still have a long way to go. Science has done much to improve Jean’s health, but so too have the prayers, pledges of energy, love, gifts, all human concerns for her well-being. And we urged our friends to continue their prayers.

Friends and colleagues all around the world are integral parts of our lives. As our families age, they become smaller in size. Only Jean’s mother and brother remain from her immediate family.

The two of us spent our lives in education, principally in church settings across the United States. Current and former colleagues as well as former students are a large part of our network of friends. Indeed, they constitute a large, extended family for us. We have

kept in touch with many of these colleagues and friends by mail and in recent years by e-mail. They have always been a support group with whom we could share joys and sorrows, and upon whom we could always count for loving concern, prayers, and many other forms of assistance. In times of need, our thoughts turn to them as readily as they turn to family. This is our understanding of church and community derived from our experience and study of our tradition's sacred writings, the Bible. Our tradition has concepts such as the "mystical body of Christ," "church as communion," and the "communion of saints."

Throughout our lives, and especially this battle with cancer, our experience of these realities—in family, friends, and colleagues—deepened.



In mid-April Jean's battle with cancer was clearly ending. Her health which had plateaued, dropped like from a precipice. She died on April 14, 1997 with her family, some friends, and many phone calls and e-mail messages assuring her that she was not alone.

P O E T R Y



The Fasting Season

Hillary Chapman

In blue black hour, we wake before the sun.
From dreams have come us lumberers through eye
Of wakefulness who leave cocoon-like beds
By wak'ners, clock-alarmed into the cold.
Clad in dishevelled night, we wend around
The stove, around the table, through the veil
Of consciousness and find our victuals there.
No conversation to profane the sleepy calm.
A last gulp of coffee washes down the night
And that which is ordained by God begins.
These are the days, O Lord, in which Thou hast
Enjoined the Fast. Forsaking food we want
Our spirits we proffer as trusts to You.
The dawn of understanding wakens new.

Hillary Chapman seeks, through her poetry, to illuminate both the nature of the spiritual life and some of the questions that arise in its actual practice. She is an English teacher returning to graduate school in child clinical psychology.





dreams

Mary E. Penrose, OSB

sometimes sparkling fireflies
sometimes fog horns--lumbering
often lightning flashes
and always
 amazing harmonies
 and dissonances
blended in by God and
 played upon the soul.

Mary E. Penrose, OSB was editor of Spirit and Life for many years and is the author of Roots Deep and Strong: Great Men and Women of the Church. She lives in Minnesota.

SPIRITUALITY & SERVICE

Harvest Moon Victoria Beynon

October moved into central Texas with a delightful coolness. Unexpected weather, I thought, driving with windows down, the brisk air reviving my spirits. Turning into the small parking lot, I spotted a space, luckily, because there were never enough in front of the old house of '40's vintage that someone had donated to be an AIDS hospice.

I was one of the hospice chaplains who visited regularly. The house, now off a busy road, had lost its former neighborliness. I doubted whether anyone along this street knew it was a hospice. Certainly, no signs were on the building. A ramp beside the front stairs, and the busy hustle of many people coming and going, suggested it was more than just an old, dumpy dwelling.

I found it a welcoming place, except when I had to answer an urgent page to assist a dying patient. Then my adrenaline surged. I prayed desperately at times.



Victoria Beynon has had short fiction and articles published in Catholic Digest, Contemplative Review, and The Catholic Spirit. The mother of four grown daughters, she and her husband are now grandparents to four little ones. She has been a hospice chaplain and is presently a part-time hospital chaplain.

Approaching the small front porch, I hailed Jess and Henry, two frail men in wheelchairs, smoking, their cigarette butts poked into a sand-filled coffee can. The breeze wafted smoke into my face. I wrinkled my nose.

"Don't tell us we'll catch cancer," Jess quipped.

"I wouldn't dare tell you anything," I laughed.

"Sure, chaplain," Henry said, nodding seriously. Was his voice more hollow sounding than it was last week? I wondered. I entered the dim front room, leaving them to their smoking and spitting. Leon, the social worker who ran the hospice for the seven or eight occupants—there was always a waiting list—immediately sent me to a needy woman patient who wanted to see the chaplain.

Leon belonged to a strong prayer group at the downtown Episcopal church. He appreciated my Catholic background and steered me to many who might never have seen a chaplain.

That I didn't look clerical, wore no veil nor clergy collar, only a simple cross, and that I was married and had kids, made me approachable. Most people, I found, thought of me as a "generic Christian." "Ecumenical" was more accurate but most had never heard the word.

The needy black woman, Rose, who had resisted help from the hospice staff, was very ill. Her name belied the heavy drug use that had brought her to this point. The "sick Rose," of Blake's poem flitted across my mind. I wondered what I could do. Would Rose be turned off by my white face? She was so weak I didn't want to wear her out with questions, either.

Instinctively, I leaned close to the stark features. Were they hostile or just struggling to concentrate? I spoke slowly. I reminded her of God's presence, of Jesus's acceptance of the lost and forsaken. I read a few short Bible passages. Then I prayed clearly, earnestly, watching her face. Rose mumbled words about Jesus and pointed to the Bible for me to read more. I read, adjusting my pace to the periodic spitting and pillow-adjusting that helped Rose breathe easier.

Over my shoulder two heavyset women waited near the door.

They introduced themselves quietly as an aunt and sister. With eyes shining tearfully, they whispered profuse thanks.

Later, when talking with me outside the door, they praised God that their sister had been “saved.” They recorded the date in their Bibles. I hadn’t looked upon the encounter so specifically. But I was pleased the family felt peaceful relief.

I left the two women, and walked down the short hallway. I felt sadness overcome me, as I passed an empty room that no longer held the vase of fresh flowers nor the crystal candy dish.

I remembered gallant, urbane Foster, who had occupied this now clean-swept room. An embarrassed smile escaped me, though, as I recalled that he had tagged me the “high priestess,” not to my face, of course, but to others when he lightly talked about his religious visits from the chaplain. He hadn’t wanted an overdose of religion but had accepted a quiet prayer, shared a joke, or appreciated someone talking with his mother.

“Get her off my back for awhile,” he had asked me with a wry smile.

I had understood. Mothers get in the way, fiercely protective to the point of smothering. This mother was planted at her son’s side.

From my own experience, I knew where the lady came from. An invisible cord of friendship and protectiveness bound me to her and helped ease some of the tension between Foster and his mother. I recalled the funeral service and the hug of thanks from the lonely woman.

Needing to review matters with Leon, and finding him busy at the moment, I sank down into the ugly, overstuffed brown-patterned parlor couch. Who would have donated such stuff, I wondered irritably. But then I noticed through the screen door that Jess was still on the front porch and he was greeting a woman and her dog.

*She
was
probably
in her
late
thirties
but in
many
ways
had
the
look of
a girl.*

"Hi, Belle," Jess said to the woman. He rubbed the dog's silky ears affectionately while it nuzzled his neck.

Belle entered the parlor and sat down. She was probably in her late thirties but in many ways had the look of a girl. She wore blue jeans, hoop earrings, a cotton long-sleeved peasant blouse. Though tall, she was graceful and slim, her dark eyes and hair and smooth complexion made her an attractive mistress to this handsome dog. I thought they would have looked great together at a dog show.

"Nice dog," I smiled at her. Belle sat with her dog at her knees, the creature relaxed but poised as if ready to obey Belle's first command.

"This is Crystal. I bring her when I work on the accounts over here. Everyone loves her, you know. You saw how Jess acted when she made up to him.

"She almost didn't make it into this world. But she's a survivor," Belle said, hugging the dog. She smiled enigmatically, "Like me, I suppose."

Belle had rescued the pregnant mother dog after she was run over by a crazy driver. All the pups had died except Crystal. Belle had kept all-day vigils feeding her with an eye dropper.

When Belle learned that I was a visiting chaplain with the hospice, she warmed up further and confided, "You know, I was healed of a tumor eight years ago." She described how she had meditated in the woods and used crystals to center herself and abet the healing. She mentioned a wonderful book that had guided her. The meditation and crystals had also helped restore her fragile sanity when her young son was killed in a car wreck.

I could barely comprehend the sadness as I listened, willing back my own tears so Belle could finish her story.

"The harvest moon is this weekend," she said. "I'll be washing my crystals by its light. They are renewed that way and gain power."

The sharp memory of Belle, her dog Crystal, and Belle's crystal lore stayed with me on my drive home. The crystals made me wonder. Were they akin to mantras, worry beads, rosaries? Life had its many symbols floating in an outer space of mystery, too difficult to

unravel. The ancient Greeks had tried to explain the remote stars in picture stories. Whatever her symbols, Belle seemed to have a core of love for everyone.

The people of my day floated by like a stream of bubbles from a child's wand. This world I worked in was poignantly heavy. I was glad relief lay ahead—supper to cook, baby-sitting a grandchild, shopping with the college daughter, and tomorrow, laundry.

When Sunday came, I was ready for a quiet evening walk along the hills by my house. October fourth was the feast of St. Francis of Assisi—everyone's favorite Saint, I mused. Slowly I uttered his prayer as I climbed the hill, breathing hard.

Lord, make me a channel of your peace...
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
as to console...
To be understood as to understand.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And in dying that we are born to eternal life.

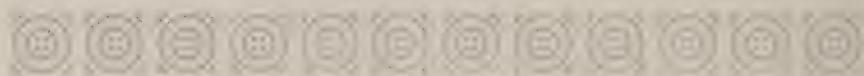
Looking up to the sky to catch my breath, I faced the brightest, boldest moon I had ever seen. The harvest moon pulsated light. The memory returned of Belle washing her crystals in a cold stream, laying them out before her for the moon glow to stir them.

A strong desire swept over me. I lifted my face to the moon and prayed.

I prayed that the Son of God, the light of the world, the light of my world, would shine upon me, would cleanse me, would be my strength.

With a joyful heart and lighter step, I continued up the hill.

P R A Y E R S



The new design of this journal was contributed
as a memorial to Gedney Russell Masten
as a type of prayer from Laurel Masten Cantor
who will always feel honored to have been
his daughter and friend.



Prayer of Simeon the New Theologian

Greek Orthodox Abbot (949-1022)

We awaken in Christ's body
as Christ awakens our bodies
and my poor hand is Christ. He enters
my foot, and is infinitely me.

I move my hand, and wonderfully
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him.
(for God is indivisibly
whole, seamless in his Godhead).

I move my foot, and at once
He appears like a flash of lightning.
Do my words seem blasphemous? - Then
open your heart to Him

and let yourself receive the One
who is opening to you so deeply.
For if we genuinely love Him
we wake up inside Christ's body

where all our body, all over
every most hidden part of it,
is realized in joy as Him.
And He makes us, utterly, real

and everything that is hurt, everything
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,

This prayer was sent to us through Dr. James A. Hall, a Jungian psychoanalyst who is a quadriplegic.

maimed, ugly, irreparably
damaged, is in Him transformed

and recognized as whole, as lovely
and radiant in His light;
we awaken as the Beloved
in every last part of our body.

A Gaelic Prayer

As the rain hides the stars,
As the Autumn mist
hides the hills,
As the clouds veil
the blue of the sky,
So the dark happenings
of my lot hide
the shining of Thy face
from me.

Yet if I may hold
Thy hand in the darkness
It is enough.....
Since I know, that
though I may stumble
in my going
Thou dost not fall.



LETTERS & LINKS

From Our Mailbox

Dear Fellowship in Prayer:

I want to tell you how powerful your prayers are. I was greatly touched and you should know about this.

Seeing your prayer list and how it was in such good taste, briefly mentioning a prayer need, I decided to add my prayer request. I am now on your list. Surely your prayers could help me work in a calm manner on some very demanding graduate school work which is important, leads to a better future in teaching and for strong eyesight for doing all this work. I added my name and never thought about it again.

Last week on Thursday in the very early afternoon, I was working at my desk when I felt very strongly a spiritual Presence. I stopped, looked up and thought, 'What is it?' Something was calling my attention. I thought about my mother and wondered if she was all right, but I didn't feel a sense that anything was wrong. I sat in quiet meditation for a few minutes because the sense of a spiritual presence was so strong that I wanted to stay with it. I felt so calm and blessed by the Spirit and then went back to work with a wonderful feeling of quietness. But I didn't know what was behind this feeling.

The next day your latest journal came. Reading the prayer list I smiled to see my name and request, but then I saw the times you meet to pray—Thursdays from 12:30 to 1:30—the time I had felt the spiritual presence. I had not known. Oh, how blessed I felt and how powerful your prayers are. Without your even knowing it, I was feeling your prayers. I feel called to join with you every Thursday and wrote the time on my calendar. If I, who didn't even know the times you pray, felt the prayers, think about those others on your list and those who do join with you—what prayer blessings are being made.

Thank you and God bless you in your work.

Sincerely,
Betty

Prayer Requests

Prayers have been requested by our readers for the following persons. Please join us in lifting them in prayer. Prayers for healing are offered every Thursday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Fellowship in Prayer offices located at 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey.

Rose and Tom from depression

Casey from manic/depressive disorder

Carolyn in her grief after her husband's death

Lorraine, Jim, Nick, and Louise from cancer

Ethel from kidney failure

Doreen for a clean bill of health

Light and strength for Barbara's nieces and nephews

Alice for guidance and wisdom through a difficult situation

Mary and Mike for good health

Betty for strengthened vision and a calm mind

Leo for guidance

Carolyn that she be returned to good health

This Holiday Season
Give Your Loved Ones
& Friends the Gift
of



SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Support them on the path of
love, compassion, and wisdom
that winds through
every page of this inspiring
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